



EPISCOPAL NEWS SERVICE

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For immediate release: CONTENTS

- **Presiding bishop's wife gets a first-hand look at Central America's recovery from Mitch (98-2274)** 1
- **Hurricane Georges' victims continue their recovery (98-2274)** 4
- **Honduras relief effort stretches across the country (98-2274)** 5
- **World Council of Churches celebrates 50th anniversary, charts new course for the future (98-2275)** 6
- **WCC provides safe place for stories of uprooted people (98-2275)** 13
- **Festival supports women in church (98-2276)** 15
- **Episcopal Women's Caucus meets (98-2277)** 17
- **Lutherans study draft of revised Concordat (98-2278)** 19

NEWSBRIEFS (98-2279) 21

NEWSFEATURES

- **AIDS conference issues warning that epidemic is not over - and churches must be more involved (98-2280)** 32
- **Presiding Bishop issues statement on Iraq (98-2281)** 35

98-2274

Presiding bishop's wife gets a first-hand look at Central America's recovery from Mitch

by Nan Cobbey and Kathryn McCormick

(ENS) With the help of many friends, Central America continues its recovery from the devastation of Hurricane Mitch. Much of the work is still focused on the emergency needs in an area where nearly a million people are homeless, but at the same time, plans are emerging for the long term.

And others are seeing the need for comfort, now and for years to come.

In her first solo journey abroad representing her husband, Presiding Bishop Frank T. Griswold, Phoebe Griswold, joined by Ann Vest, interim director of the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, the Rev. Canon Ricardo Potter-Norman, of the Episcopal Church's Office for Anglican and Global Relations, and Nan Cobbey, features editor for *Episcopal Life* newspaper, visited a number of sites in Honduras and Nicaragua to see how people were responding to the devastation caused by the hurricane last October.

As she walked through the rubble-strewn streets and makeshift shacks in hurricane-battered Honduras on December 11, Griswold tried to deliver a simple message: "We are one family."

She delivered it in many ways—in hugs that she gave mothers who had lost children, in listening as strangers recounted painful stories of loss, in acts of spontaneous generosity, and even in the simple gifts she gave those who had shown courage or leadership during the crisis that has taken more than 10,000 lives and left hundreds of thousands homeless.

With a smile, she gave "One Earth, One Family, One God" pins to those she met, reciting the words—"Una tierra, una familia, una Dios"—in increasingly confident Spanish during her four-day visit.

Griswold went to Central America, which has just experienced what international government agencies are calling the worst natural disaster in 200 years, to learn how the Presiding Bishop's Fund could help—beyond the timely contribution it has already made. As of December 18, the Fund had wired a total of \$146,000 in emergency grants to the five dioceses in Central America that were hit by Hurricane Mitch. Another \$260,000 in donations earmarked for disaster aid in Central America is in the Fund's Hurricane Relief account, awaiting further decisions on how best to use the money, according to Claudette Malcolm of the Fund.

In addition, the Episcopal Church is a longtime supporter of Church World Service, the emergency relief arm of the National Council of Churches, which not only has sent supplies to Central America but has sponsored several volunteer medical teams seeking to treat injuries and prevent outbreaks of cholera, skin ailments and other afflictions that arrive after every natural disaster.

Center of disaster

But Griswold had a deeper agenda than just meeting immediate need. As she and the group with her traveled with a video crew taping on behalf of the Fund, she articulated her hope that the church would be able to focus more on long-term efforts and sustainable development in the future.

What she saw of the Fund's work impressed her.

"I was so proud of the Episcopal Church," she recalled in an interview after her return home to New York City. She and Vest had traveled with Bishop Leo Frade of Honduras and Bishop Sturdie Downs of Nicaragua and their wives, she said, "and there they were, at the center of the disaster, being the church, being right there where the suffering was."

She and Vest followed Frade into areas where families had lost their homes, possessions, crops, a whole way of life. In Honduras' Sula Valley—a major agricultural area where thousands have died and where 90 percent of the banana crop was lost, taking livelihoods with it—they joined Frade's youth brigades and distributed truckloads of grains, beans, flour, oil, water, salt and clothing that had been donated by churches in Florida and Mississippi.

To date, 30 U.S. dioceses and half a dozen other countries around the Anglican Communion have sent or pledged support to the Diocese of Honduras as it rebuilds its churches and the communities they serve.

The church is responsible for maintaining 10 shelters in the San Pedro Sula area and more around Tegucigalpa, the country's capital. Thousands are living in these shelters and probably will be for months to come.

Vest and Griswold visited one in Puerto Cortes, near San Pedro Sula, that they aren't likely to soon forget. In a cavernous, concrete-floored gymnasium, live 342 people—90 of them children under 5—their few remaining pieces of clothing, enameled pans and plastic bowls, their kerosene burners and salvaged toys neatly arranged on bleachers.

When Vest and Griswold walked into that scene, they heard from men, members of the "committee of administration," how all residents—elderly and infants included—had to sleep directly on the concrete floor that at that moment was wet with puddles from a flash shower that had leaked through the roof.

They had no pads or blankets for cushioning. Saddened, Vest and Griswold listened to Frade's translation of the men's account. Then he told them: "We need about \$4,400 just to buy mats." Their response was instant. "Is there a place we can buy the mats?"

"Yes," he said. "In San Pedro Sula."

"I have a credit card," said Vest.

"So have I," said Griswold.

"And they can be here by truck tomorrow," said Frade.

"Do it," said Griswold. And Frade pulled out his cell phone and called in the order. Earlier that same day, the group visited a tent city along a main highway. "This is the only place they have, their island city surrounded by muck," said Frade, indicating the cardboard, tin, plastic and wooden shacks that had been assembled on high ground at the road's edge. Their former neighborhood, at the foot of the embankment, rested under 3½ feet of mud. They had wanted to stay near what had been home.

Standing with the suffering

The roadside, however, posed a danger. The night before one of their community—Valeriano Martinez—was killed by a speeding truck as he crossed the highway. He was killed instantly. The truck did not stop.

When Griswold, Vest and Frade arrived, Martinez was laid out on pieces of cardboard atop a plastic table, a sheet covering his body. As his sister wept and the community gathered around, Frade blessed the body and began to pray. Griswold embraced the weeping sister. Then the bishop used his cell phone to arrange for a casket and funeral for that afternoon.

As the travelers said goodbye, Griswold told the camera: "This is exactly where the church needs to be ... with the people in their suffering, standing with them."

Meanwhile, as her visit to Central America continued, officials for the United States, several European countries and the World Bank promised Honduras and Nicaragua a massive new package of debt relief and financial aid.

The assistance includes more than \$1.5 billion in new development grants, a three-year respite from repayment of bilateral debt, additional money to cover payments due to international banks and an eventual write-off of large chunks of their foreign debts.

The actions came even as debt relief, a key issue at the Lambeth Conference last summer, also appeared on the agenda of the World Council of Churches Eighth Assembly, held in early December in Zimbabwe. In Central America, debt relief is a key to long-term recovery from Hurricane Mitch. According to Oxfam International, Honduras' foreign debt totals \$4.1 billion, with interest payments consuming a third of the country's revenues before the storm; Nicaragua's total foreign debt totals about \$6.1 billion, with debt service payments accounting for more than half of government revenue.

U.S. officials said that the assistance was necessary, not only for long-term recovery but "to prepare the countries of Central America for the competitive global economy of the 21st century."

Inter-American Development Bank President Enrique Iglesias cautioned, however, that the objective should be not only reconstruction but also transformation, avoiding the mistakes of the past.

For now, Central America's hands are full with the problems of the present and the specter of huge problems in the future.

For example, the loss of most of the area's agricultural production means that countries will lose export revenue to pay their bills, but the situation also has officials fearing that farm workers who no longer have work or even land will migrate to cities where overdevelopment has already caused significant urban problems.

These problems, such as haphazard development, poor basic-service delivery and hillside deforestation, contributed to the destruction caused by Hurricane Mitch.

Contributions to the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief may be designated for particular areas and may be sent to the Fund, c/o Bankers Trust, Box 12043, Newark, New Jersey 07101.

--Nan Cobbey is features editor for Episcopal Life newspaper; Kathryn McCormick is associate director of the Office of News and Information for the Episcopal Church.

98-2274

Hurricane Georges' victims continue their recovery

by Ed Stannard

The winds, the rain—and much of the world's attention—have moved on, but the people of Central America and the Caribbean see reminders everyday of the two hurricanes that ripped through the regions this fall.

But coping with the loss of loved ones, wrecked homes and mud everywhere is only the first step for the hurricane victims. Already, the affected areas are getting on with the massive job of reconstruction.

Hurricane Georges, which hit the Caribbean and U.S. Gulf Coast last September, killed 602 and caused \$5 billion in damage in this country alone, according to the National Hurricane Center. In Hurricane Mitch, called the deadliest storm in 200 years, aimed at Central America and Mexico in October and early November, more than 9,000 died.

"The first three months [of] next year, we hope to finish the reconstruction of the houses," said Bishop Martín Barahona of El Salvador, where almost 300 died and 125 more disappeared. He said the initial relief work, distributing food, medicines and other materials is pretty much finished.

The work in El Salvador has been aided by ecumenical cooperation. "We established immediately an ecumenical emergency committee," Barahona said, "sharing with the Lutheran, Reformed and some Baptist churches, we worked together with the Lutheran World Federation."

In Guatemala, another of the four Central American countries ravaged by Mitch—though not as badly as Honduras and Nicaragua—an emergency relief team of lay and clergy was formed, according to the Rev. Virginia Hall, director of San Tomás seminary. The focus in Guatemala has been in the eastern lowlands, where banana plantations were all but wiped out. "We have churches in those areas and the diocese sent [supplies] within a couple of days," Hall said.

Anglicans immediately got involved in relief and reconstruction efforts. In Puerto Barrios, a Caribbean port, "One of our seminarians [Marlin Estrada] and her priest [the Rev. Eugenio Espinoza] were very active in a community shelter which the town helped get together ... in a school."

Two other towns, Morales and Mariscos, also were hard hit, along with Puerto Barrios. According to Rudy Busé, an American who grew up in Guatemala and recently attended the diocesan convention, the church in Morales is being used as a shelter. One church in Mariscos, however, is on the edge of a ravine and part has collapsed.

Conditions are still dire in the country and epidemics are a constant threat. Squatters have begun living on the banks of the Gualan River—a video of the area was shown at Guatemala's recent diocesan convention—and water tanks and purifiers have been brought in. "I can't imagine actually how they're doing any of this because [of] having lived there and knowing what the conditions are ... I don't know how they're managing it."

Busé noted, "Their one big concern is as this becomes old news, that this is going to be a long-term problem. The second concern is jobs," he said. "Multinational banana companies will not reinvest fully in the areas" where their plantations were, because there had been a glut on the market.

Spirits are positive overall, however, Busé said. "People generally were thankful for the support they'd received, both physical and emotional; the whole society is very fatalistic ... [They think], it happened and we will now see how we'll move forward or continue."

The Rev. Bob Stevens has been traveling to the Dominican Republic, which is still recovering from Hurricane Georges, even though it's been overshadowed by Mitch's devastation. He coordinates relationships between the Dominican Republic and three U.S. dioceses, South Carolina, Southwest Florida, Western Louisiana.

Bishop Julio C. Holguín made the needs of the people his first priority. Only then did he begin to look at repairing damaged churches and schools, said Stevens. "He bought several thousand sheets of tin," which are used as roofing material. Wood and bedding material also was provided and some new houses were built.

"I'm real impressed," said Stevens, who traveled to the island on Thanksgiving weekend. "There's been a very concerted effort and they have done well with getting back on their feet."

Stevens' assessment of the Dominican Republic is a foretaste of where the more heavily damaged countries of Central America are headed: "What I see is the whole perspective is them making that transition — they're past the relief stage, into the reconstruction stage and moving into more long-term development work."

Contributions, which may be designated for particular areas, may be sent to the Presiding Bishop's Fund for World Relief, c/o Bankers Trust, Box 12043, Newark, NJ 07101.

--Ed Stannard is news editor of Episcopal Life newspaper.

98-2274

Honduras relief effort stretches across the country

by Kathryn McCormick

(ENS) Central America might seem to be a distant piece of geography to the people in and near Kilmarnock, Virginia, but that didn't stop the members of Grace Church there from launching an aid project in mid-November to help the people of Honduras.

Led by a retired Army general, William C. Louisell, and supported by the church's rector, the Rev. Hugh C. White III, the project begun by the church outreach committee grew into an ecumenical effort that eventually gathered 12.5 tons of tools, medicine, food and cookware for shipment to one of the areas worst hit by Hurricane Mitch.

Their shipment was expected to reach Central America early in January. The project began with Grace Church's decision to collect the materials and a call by White to

Robert Jones of St. Paul's Church in Norfolk, Virginia. Jones, a trucking company executive, saw to the shipping details. After talking with Bishop Leo Frade of Honduras to determine what the diocese needed most, Grace Church sent out a call to other churches to help collect items and sort and pack them.

Several churches joined the ecumenical response and the collection began with a few shovels, handsaws, pots and pans. That turned into a torrent of tools and supplies, all sorted, cleaned and even sharpened when necessary, then boxed and made ready for shipment.

With the materials came donations of money, which is now being used to purchase small solar-powered water purification systems for Honduras.

"The response by this small community might be termed extraordinary if it were not happening across the nation," said Suzy Norman, a member of Grace Church's outreach committee.

Despite reports of shipping delays and snafus that have left tons of food, clothing and supplies in warehouses from California to New Jersey, collections and fund-raising activities have brought together volunteers in many projects.

The Diocese of Washington, D.C., is working to raise hundreds of thousands of dollars for Honduran relief, collected materials that has been organized into boxes that can be distributed to individual families (with plans for items such as construction tools to be shipped later), and is gearing up to eventually send engineers, construction teams and medical teams.

The Diocese of Northern Indiana sent three trucks as part of its effort on behalf of Honduras, and many parishes, such as St. Simon's in Miami (which counted Frade as a member when he was a youngster), launched efforts, often with other churches, to help in the reconstruction of Central America.

--Kathryn McCormick is associate director of the Office of News and Information for the Episcopal Church.

98-2275

World Council of Churches celebrates 50th anniversary, charts new course for the future

by James Solheim

(ENS) Almost a thousand delegates from over 300 members of the World Council of Churches (WCC) met in Zimbabwe for nearly two weeks to celebrate the ecumenical organization's 50th anniversary—and to chart what they hoped would be a new course for a new millennium.

African drums and exuberant songs welcomed jet-lagged delegates to the opening service at the University of Harare December 3 where WCC General Secretary Konrad Raiser praised the decision to hold the Eighth Assembly in Harare, despite an unsettled political environment in the country and threatened boycotts by some Orthodox churches unhappy with the organization.

"How wonderful and significant to hear the words of Jesus here, in mother Africa, where they take on a unique rhythm and flavor; in mother Africa, so easily forgotten and ignored by the powerful when convenient, so unknown by so many, so exploited and stepped upon by others, but also so beloved by so many of us. Here, in this continent, in Africa, where Jesus received asylum and protection as an infant 2000 years ago," said the Rev. Eunice Santana of Puerto Rico, one of the presidents of the WCC, in her opening sermon. Sounding the Jubilee theme of the assembly, she asked, "Now all the international debts are being carefully counted, but where was the human accounting when colonialism crushed the people?"

The nature of the challenge facing the WCC as it seeks to redefine its role was apparent from comments by its top leaders at the opening plenary. "Institutional ecumenism is in crisis," said Catholicos Aram I of Lebanon, moderator of the Central Committee. "Much of our constituency is disillusioned with the institutional expressions of the ecumenical movement... especially the youth who do not want to become prisoners of structures."

The moderator said that "unless the churches re-own the ecumenical movement and re-articulate clearly its vision by making it relevant to the life of the people, [it] may lose its vitality, its sense of purpose." Looking back over history he said that "we have both much to rejoice in and much to repent over" but he is convinced that the WCC has steadily moved towards "a real partnership." But he reminded delegates that the organization "is an instrument and not a goal in itself. It serves the churches in their common task of taking the Gospel into the world and in their common calling to grow together in obedience to the command of Jesus Christ."

Aram also confronted one of the more vexing issues facing the assembly and the future of the WCC—the role of the Orthodox members. While they have played a vital role, "they have not integrated themselves fully into the total life and witness of the council," he observed, largely because of "Protestant theology which continues to dominate the council's theological language, thinking and methodologies." Unless the WCC takes Orthodox concerns seriously, "I fear that the Orthodox participation will steadily dwindle."

Prior to the assembly Orthodox leaders had warned that continued participation would depend on what Russian Patriarch Alexy II of Russia called "total reconstruction" of the WCC. Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople, who holds the position of "first among equals" among Orthodox leaders, sent a letter to the assembly charging that "a series of liberal, theological and moral positions" had been adopted since the 1991 assembly in Canberra, "by a variety of member churches, mainly of the Northern hemisphere."

Later the assembly endorsed a three-year commission to study the participation of the Orthodox.

Raiser also confronted the issue, asking whether "membership" is the only arrangement or even the most appropriate form of taking part in the ecumenical movement. He asked the assembly to consider the formation of a Forum of Christian Churches and Ecumenical Organizations in which "participation is more important than membership." Such a forum, which could include Roman Catholics and a wide range of evangelical churches, would offer a space to discuss common challenges facing the ecumenical movement and make decisions on ways to cooperate. "The WCC would participate in the forum alongside other partners, without claiming any privileged place."

Raiser has pushed hard for the Forum because of his conviction that the "organized ecumenical movement," including the WCC, represents "only one segment of world Christianity." The assembly approved a plan that could culminate in a forum at Pentecost 2001.

Common understanding and vision?

Plenary debate on the document Towards a Common Understanding and Vision (CUV), which grew out of a study begun in 1989 and was adopted by the Central Committee in 1997, exposed widely divergent opinions on the future of the WCC.

Pointing out that many churches had not participated in the CUV process of self-examination, Dr. Agnes Abuom of Kenya asked, "What does it mean to talk about Christian unity when we churches are breaking up? What does it mean in a broken world?"

The Rev. Leonid Kishkovsky of the Orthodox Church in America (which is linked to the Russian Orthodox Church) said that the WCC was formed in 1948 to deal primarily with issues linked to the 16th century Protestant Reformation. "The churches of the East were not and are not part of this story. The Reformation is not our story," he said. "Its theological debates and presuppositions are not our theological debates and presuppositions."

After several comments by Orthodox delegates who sought to distance themselves from the WCC, an obviously exasperated delegate from the Church of England, the Rev. Rose Hudson-Wilkin, said that the debate was "really about power." She added, "At the risk of sounding naïve, what is the problem here? It seems the road we have gone down is, My church is bigger than yours, or, I have more money than you, or, My church has this long and important tradition." She pointed out that the Decade Festival ending the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women, which preceded the assembly, said the opposite, that "Your story is my story." She concluded, "If we're going to listen to each other, we cannot do it from a distance. That means walking side by side with me, even if you are uncomfortable."

An experiment in conversation

In an experiment unique to a WCC assembly, delegates were offered a dazzling array of opportunities to discuss issues and activities in small groups called padares, based on a traditional Shona "meeting place." The goal, according to Raiser, was "to make visible the richness and health of the life of the churches."

Almost 600 exhibits, presentations, performances and discussions were offered in scattered locations across the large campus of the university. "This is not a place for resolutions, but for the free exchange of ideas—and sometimes they will be controversial," said Raiser in his introduction. Eleven of the padares dealt with the issue of homosexuality, for example--the only time the issue appeared on the agenda. Members of an advisory committee moved among the padares in an attempt to "maintain the open spirit" and to report back to the WCC planning committees.

Reactions of delegates varied widely. Some reported that no one showed up for padares, and in some cases the leaders didn't show up. Others complained about accessibility, especially on such a large campus, one that was not lighted during the evening sessions.

The session on unity issues seemed to draw the most participants, but workshops on globalization and debt were also quite popular. "It is particularly unfortunate for some Third World organizations who have spent many thousands of dollars bringing personnel and materials to Harare, only to find that their presentation has been lost in the confusion and dispersal of the display locations," said the Rev. Ron O'Grady, a retired ecumenical staff official.

African setting is key

"The decision to go to Harare for the Eighth Assembly expressed our determination that the ecumenical fellowship of churches would not weaken its solidarity with African churches and people as they search for new foundations upon which to affirm their identity and reconstruct viable forms of community life," said Raiser in his report to the assembly.

Several prominent guests spoke directly to the WCC's support for liberation movements in Africa. President Robert Mugabe of Zimbabwe made a passionate appeal to member churches to help end what he called "a global conspiracy against poor nations," in a world dominated by "bullies."

He cited the debt burden and international trade practices as major factors in wrecking the economies of poor nations. The current debt stands at \$379 for every man, woman and child on the continent, higher in Zimbabwe. "Where are men and women of prophetic witness, our seers and our moral and spiritual liberators?" Mugabe asked. He challenged the WCC to "lead in calling the world back to sane and human goals that edify God's image," to use its "moral authority to appeal to the powerful nations of the West to agree to write off the debts of Third World nations."

Mugabe paid a glowing tribute to the WCC for its "courageous gesture" in 1969 when it supported Zimbabwe's struggle against colonialism and established a controversial Program to Combat Racism and a special fund to channel humanitarian support to liberation organizations. He also scolded some churches for their acceptance of a "colonial ethos" among missionaries, arguing that they had played midwife to colonialism, "succumbing or voluntarily surrendering God to the racism of colonial structures." Yet he pointed out that other churches spoke against the excesses of colonial rule and "paid dearly for their conscience" by deportation or death.

Mugabe is in the middle of a struggle to claim land from white farmers whose property has been protected since the new nation was formed in 1980 from former Rhodesia. In efforts to reassure Great Britain that the farmers would be justly compensated, he bristled at charges in the British press that accused him of "larceny, tyranny, brutality and racism."

Although he did not address the issue of homosexuality in his speech, Mugabe has made frequent vitriolic attacks on gays, calling them "worse than pigs." As he left the plenary, he was asked for a comment by a Dutch journalist and suggested that the church should take a role "to cure them from their diseased way of life.... This is the church, this is the organization that can purge them."

Mandela thanks WCC for support

It was the surprise appearance of Nelson Mandela, president of South Africa, that produced an infusion of new energy at a special plenary celebrating the WCC's 50th anniversary. Accompanied by Mugabe, Mandela received a tumultuous welcome, and in his address made a passionate appeal to the WCC to give the same support to the struggle for the development of democracy in Africa that it gave to liberation movements.

In expressing gratitude to the churches, he praised the WCC for "activating the conscience of the world for peace and on behalf of the poor, the disadvantaged and the dispossessed."

Citing the Program to Combat Racism and the special fund to support liberation movements, he said, "Your support exemplified in the most concrete way the contribution that religion has made to our liberation, from the days when religious bodies took responsibility for the education of the oppressed because it was denied to us by our rulers, to support for our liberation struggle." He said that the people of southern Africa and the whole continent regard the WCC as "champion of the oppressed and exploited."

Mandela said that "the name of the WCC struck fear in the hearts of those who ruled our country during the inhuman days of apartheid. To mention your name was to incur the wrath of the authorities. To indicate support for your views was to be labeled an enemy of the state."

Development is the challenge of the new millenium, Mandela argued. "My own continent of Africa dreams of an African renaissance in which, through reconstruction and development, we will overcome the legacy of a devastating past and ensure that peace, human rights, democracy, growth and development are a living reality for all Africans."

When the WCC moved "to the risk of active engagement in the struggle to end oppression," it broke new ground and now it was time "to show that same engagement in the new and more difficult struggle for development and the entrenchment of democracy."

In its closing days, the assembly confirmed its commitment to Africa, rejecting negative views of the continent and stressing in a statement that "the emphasis should be positive, leaving behind the notes of fatalism, despair and helplessness which tend to characterize some attitudes and responses."

To underscore the danger of speaking the truth to power, a group of delegates urged the WCC not to be a party to a conspiracy of silence on genocide "being perpetrated by the Islamic fundamentalist regime in Khartoum against the people of southern Sudan." They spoke in response to a sermon by Roman Catholic Bishop Paride Taban of the Sudan who offered an eyewitness account of bombing raids. A week after he spoke, he was the object of a bombing raid himself. The WCC sent a strong letter to Sudan's foreign minister, saying that "it is strongly suspected that units of the Sudanese army were responsible for this atrocious act. According to some reports we have received, the attack was in retribution for a sermon Bishop Paride preached in a public stadium here in Harare at the special invitation of the WCC. It urged the minister "to take immediate measures to ensure his absolute personal security and identify and bring to justice the perpetrators of this terrible act."

Role of women and youth

Most delegates seemed to support a letter from the Decade Festival calling on the assembly to condemn violence against women as a sin. The Rev. Deenabandhu Manchala of India, one of the panelists in the plenary, asked, "Does the church wish to remain custodian of a culture of violence or a catalyst to a culture of life? We must stop seeing violence against women as a women's problem."

The decade should not have been perceived as a threat by any church, said Metropolitan Ambrosius of the Orthodox Church of Finland. But several Orthodox delegates complained about what they saw as a radical feminist agenda. While affirming the call for human and social rights for women, "So long as other WCC churches advocated an agenda calling for all churches to ordain women and to accept inclusive language, the eucharistic unity that is a dream will never come true," warned the Rev. Vsevolod Chaplin of the Russian Orthodox Church.

An attempt to provide adequate representation of women and youth on the 150-member Central Committee exposed some deep fissures. Bishop Melvin Talbert of the United Methodist Church, moderator of the nominations committee, expressed deep frustration in trying to achieve a balance, calling the slate "unacceptable." Dr. Marion Best of the United Church of Canada said in response, "I feel a very deep disappointment, fast rising to a high level of anger. When the Ecumenical Decade in Solidarity with Women was launched, I tried to support it, I met with church leaders, and now the percentage of women on the Central Committee is less than it was at Canberra. I don't know if I want to be part of the WCC if it doesn't change."

Talbert said that some churches had "found various reasons" to decline a request to include more women on the list they sent to the committee and some men had "emphatically stated that no woman would replace them." When the assembly considered the final slate, it brushed aside attempts to nominate men to replace women, including one from the Armenian Apostolic Church. A quarter of the churches at the assembly is represented exclusively by male delegations. The WCC has attempted to have a minimum of 40 percent women among the delegations but the goal is difficult when Orthodox delegations are over 85 percent male.

Women moved close to the 40 percent goal on the final slate for Central Committee. Pamela P. Chinnis, president of the House of Deputies and leader of the Episcopal Church delegation at the assembly, was one of two Anglicans from North America elected to the committee. She also served on the critical business committee at the assembly, responsible for daily operations.

The same issues of balance plagued the election of presidents for the WCC. The assembly rejected a proposal to have the Central Committee appoint the presidents, requiring the nominations committee to scramble to prepare a slate for consideration on the closing day.

The presidents are chosen on a regional basis. Africa will be represented by Agnes Abuom of the Anglican Church of Kenya; Asia--Moon Kyu Kang of the Presbyterian Church of Korea; Europe--Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesus and Bishop Eberhardt Renz of the Evangelical Church in Germany; Latin America/Caribbean--Bishop Frederico Pagura of the Evangelical Methodist Church of Argentina; Middle East--Mar Ignatius Zakka Iwas of the Syrian Orthodox Church; North America--Kathryn Bannister of the United Methodist Church; and Bishop Jabez Bryce of the Anglican Church in Aotearoa/New Zealand and Polynesia.

The assembly re-elected Aram I as moderator, and chose as vice-moderators Justice Sophia Adinyira, an Anglican from the Province of West Africa, and Marion Best of Canada.

The issue of homosexuality emerged during a debate in the closing plenary on a resolution on human rights. "Our support for human rights will ring increasingly hollow until we speak out against violence done to our gay and lesbian brothers and sisters," said Dr. Paul Sherry, president of the United Church of Christ in the U.S. "Our silence in the midst of this violence is deafening."

When the program guidelines committee identified the issue of human sexuality as one of seven areas for WCC work in the future, Russian Orthodox delegate Vladimir Shmaliy warned that "any move to develop a homosexual agenda would severely jeopardize Orthodox participation in the WCC." His move to delete the issue from the report was soundly defeated.

The other six issues identified by the committee were: worship and spirituality, inclusive community, non-violence and reconciliation, globalization, debt cancellation, and creative ways to accomplish the WCC's work with less budget and staff.

Among the major resolutions the WCC called for:

- debt cancellation for impoverished nations, debt reduction for middle-income nations, and international economic reforms to prevent recurrence of debt;
- alternative responses to activities of transnational corporations and other international financial institutions, and restrictions on the unlimited flow of capital that produces "instant profits and equally instant disasters" for the rich and poor;
- a decision on the status of Jerusalem that includes Jews, Muslims and Christians for whom the city is holy and by the two peoples who call it home, the Israelis and Palestinians.
- condemnation of the use of children in warfare, calling for an immediate moratorium on their recruitment.

A message of hope

Despite some strong objections to an early draft, on its closing day the assembly issued a message of hope, "Being together under the cross in Africa." Emphasizing the theme of the assembly, "Turn to God—Rejoice in Hope," it said, "As we have turned once again to God, we have been able to rejoice in hope. We invite you to share with us the vision which we have been able to express together and which, we pray, will become a part of a common life and witness."

"We are challenged by the vision of a church, the people of God on the way together, confronting all divisions of race, gender, age or culture, striving to realize justice and peace, upholding the integrity of creation," the message said in one clause. "We journey together as a people with resurrection faith. In the midst of exclusion and despair, we embrace, in joy and hope, the promise of life in all its fullness. We journey together as a people of prayer. In the midst of confusion and loss of identity, we discern God's signs of God's purpose being fulfilled and expect the coming of God's reign."

Episcopal Church participants react

In a brief interview with delegates and visitors at the assembly from the Episcopal Church, there was unanimous agreement about the hospitality of the people of Zimbabwe and the exciting variety of worship. The Rev. Patrick Mauney, director of Anglican and Global Relations, expressed surprise that the people he encountered spoke so openly of politics in Zimbabwe.

The Rev. David Perry, the church's ecumenical officer, said that the formation of a commission to address the concerns of the Orthodox members of the WCC was "very positive, a signal that we are still together in the search for a common vision. We kept the conversation going."

Richard Parkins of Episcopal Migration Ministries said that "the setting and participation of Africans gave it a sense of reality, especially in dealing with issues such as international debt."

The youngest member of the delegation, 22-year-old Aldo Rincon of the Dominican Republic, said that it seemed "difficult for youth leaders to make their mark at the assembly." He found some of the talk by WCC leaders about youth participation "superficial," and felt that the assembly blocked any efforts to make substantial changes.

Perry is encouraged that the assembly made a clear commitment to meet the needs of member churches and take what he called "some big steps forward," even though they were not always evident in such a complicated meeting. "Instead of self-destructing, as some were predicting, the delegates laid the foundation for a common vision. As Anglicans we will provide whatever leadership we can to implement that vision."

--James Solheim is director of the Office of News and Information for the Episcopal Church and covered the assembly for ENS.

98-2275

WCC provides safe place for stories of uprooted people

by Richard Parkins

(ENS) Over forty "padares" or meeting places provided opportunities for the issue of forcibly displaced people to be examined. Church groups from India, the Middle East, Great Britain, Belgium, Canada, the United States, Hungary, Uruguay, Switzerland, Ethiopia, South Africa and Zimbabwe relayed accounts of extending hospitality to refugees, sometimes in the face of restrictive and even hostile governments who were more likely to close doors than extend the welcome to newcomers in their midst or as a supplement to the work of more generous governments whose scant resources could not allow them to do more.

The Interchurch Committee for Refugees in Canada reported cases advanced by church groups and other immigrant rights organizations where the courts become the vehicle for redressing punitive government practices which would have separated families or summarily deported persons without a chance for a full hearing. The ecumenical efforts of Canadian churches have focused on establishing precedents which would undo the harsher laws now impacting asylum seekers in Canada.

An Anglican Tamil leader told of desperate efforts to press churches into solidarity with a growing Tamil community seeking safety in Britain where their plight is compounded by increasing governmental reluctance to provide transitional aid to newcomers who need time to secure employment and "settle in."

Several Tamils described in moving detail how their efforts to mobilize thousands of Tamil refugees in South India had produced remarkable self-help programs which had resulted in a relatively self-sufficient Tamil community in a country whose government had not officially welcomed them and had, in fact, denied them the assistance that would have ordinarily been theirs through the intervention of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees (UNHCR). Since India does not formally recognize the UNHCR, Tamil refugees are assisted only to the extent that churches and other humanitarian organizations step in. This church group is helping to fill the void for a refugee community that has for years been struggling for identity and sustenance.

Friends from All Saints Cathedral (Cairo) offered moving accounts of their ministry to displaced Sudanese whose limbo status in Egypt has been a long and painful saga. All Saints has been one of the few centers of aid for Sudanese who for years have awaited either resettlement or repatriation.

An important lesson emerging from several of the accounts was the extent to which countries which are struggling with their own poverty have graciously received their uprooted neighbors. The churches in southern Africa, particularly Zimbabwe, have been among the most generous and creative in giving solace to fleeing neighbors. Churches in Uruguay have undertaken important initiatives in reaching out to the growing number of internally displaced persons in Latin America—again a response to a situation for which there is no formal international response since the mandate of the UNHCR does not extend to the internally displaced.

In all these instances, people of faith have often been the sole source of assistance and advocacy for those who are clearly among our most vulnerable and marginalized neighbors. This assistance is often rendered by groups who have meager resources with which to fill the void that governments and international agencies have allowed to exist. The church groups making presentations at Harare were taking care not only of their own but giving hospitality as widely as they could possibly stretch. The accounts at Harare were modern versions of the parable of the Good Samaritan—accepting uncritically those in need as neighbors and rendering whatever hospitality they could muster.

The plethora of stories told in the pades reflects the universality of the crisis of uprooted persons and the fervor of refugees and their caregivers in pleading for the moral and material support needed from faith communities. Their presence at the WCC assembly was an attempt to give witness to their tragedy and to widen the network of witnesses and advocates. Harare was a safe arena where pleas to brothers and sisters could be made and where, therefore, virtually invisible crises made visible.

The stories of forcibly displaced persons occurred against a backdrop of hearings, discussions, and formal statements about the ill effects of economic globalization and the international debt crisis. Included also was attention to the end of the Decade of Women and future work needed to bring justice and equality to the women of the world. Refugees were acknowledged as the victims of forces precipitated by the poverty and economic and political fragility of systems wrecked by oppressive debt repayment obligations and the globalization of financial systems which are often insensitive to the human consequences of their global maneuvering. Moreover, as women and children are the largest segment of the refugee population, and certainly the most vulnerable, the examination in one padare of the violence and trauma facing refugee women was a poignant sequel to earlier discussions about the victimization of women in so many parts of the world.

The U.S. churches effectively brought home some of the critical issues facing churches as they are called to speak more fervently on behalf of displaced persons. A session on the "hard questions" facing those working with refugees generated serious comment about the seeming persistence and proliferation of refugee crises and the need to address root causes rather than just the aftermath of internal violence which produces "the forcibly displaced."

Another U.S. sponsored session dramatized the various reasons often expressed for churches and church people not responding fully to these crises, giving attention to all of the excuses for stepping aside as the forcible displacement of persons looms as one of the greatest humanitarian challenges of the next millenium.

While little was offered through resolutions to underscore specific refugee situations, with the exception of attention to the ongoing tragedy of southern Sudanese, the plight of the uprooted was an issue interwoven with the broad measures adopted by the WCC as it contemplated its mission for the future. Some came to the Assembly hoping to secure support for their specific refugee crisis and were disappointed not to have their tragedy formally acknowledged. It is inevitable, however, that the many conversations that took place at Harare will be the catalyst for a stronger and clearer role for churches in lifting up the despair of refugees and their inextricable relationship to the broader themes of globalization and debt relief - themes that will surely occupy the WCC in the years ahead.

--Richard Parkins is director of Episcopal Migration Ministries for the Episcopal Church.

98-2276

Festival supports women in church

(ENS) With song, dance, theater and thoughtful reflection, more than 1,000 women and 30 men from around the world who had gathered in Harare, Zimbabwe, for the World Council of Churches' four-day Ecumenical Festival explored the many ways they could continue work for justice for women, both in the church and in the world.

The huge gathering marked the end in 1998 of the Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. What many women found during those 10 years was solidarity among themselves, but continuing frustration with churches that have been slow to

acknowledge their full participation. But after working for 10 years to discover their common ground, most agreed that they must—and will—push harder for change.

“We can no longer just call for solidarity,” Dr. Musimbi Kanyoro, general secretary of the World Young Women’s Christian Association, told the group at the opening of the festival on November 27, “but rather we need to be part of a redefining and redesigning process for all the changes we hoped for during this Decade.... We will not accept our gifts being minimized: we will lift up all the gifts of the people of God.”

By the end of the festival, on November 30, the gathering had produced a letter to the WCC’s Eighth Assembly, scheduled to begin meeting the next day, calling on the WCC’s 332 member churches to declare that violence against women is a sin, commit resources to “restore (women) to their rightful place in God’s household,” and denounce economic injustice and racism.

The festival was filled with symbols—such as a jar that held water from different countries representing the tears of women—and with ceremony, including drumming, dancing, and celebrations of the many positive stories of women worldwide.

A continent of hope

Dr. Mercy Oduyoye of Ghana, a former deputy general secretary of the WCC, was acknowledged for her work in theology. Noting that Africa is “a continent of hope,” she declared, “God makes a way where there is no way.”

She described the first African Theological Conference in 1980, which led to a community of theological study for women. “We have declared ourselves theologians,” said Oduyoye. “We refuse to be told there are no theologians in Africa because there are no (male) theologians.” She is currently establishing an ecumenical institute in Ghana.

Esther Inayat, volunteer president of the recently formed Women’s Synodical of the Church of Pakistan, reported that participants in her group had convinced the church’s synod to have women delegates, with full voting rights, from every diocese of the church. The synodical also now has its own office, with a full-time coordinator and two assistants.

But even as people cheered the increasing participation of women in church governance, there still was concern that churches in general lacked full commitment to recognizing the needs of women. The Rev. Dr. Konrad Raiser, general secretary of the WCC, later committed himself to pressing for the changes that need to be made.

In other parts of the festival, participants decried violence against women. Sharing stories and many tears, they joined in a “hearing” on violence that eventually revealed frustration with male-dominated church structures that they said have long refused to take women’s experience seriously.

After several tales of physical abuse suffered by women around the world, a New Zealand clergywoman told of another kind of abuse—that of her bishop who had upheld her forced resignation from a church job, labeling as a “personal threat” her request for an evaluation of the situation.

“To those who look at me the metaphorical bruises do not show,” she said. “Yet from the inside the ‘bruises’ have become disabling. The face of the institution is still smiling benevolently, the words from its painted mouth are still sweet.”

While incorporating calls for action that would deal with some of these injustices cited by women, the document eventually approved also called on churches and ecumenical groups to demand cancellation of debts owed by the poorest nations, work for changes in laws that now exclude women from property and other rights, work to ensure equal pay for men and women, break the links between exploitation of the earth and economic growth, and challenge the links between militarism, the arms trade and global economic institutions.

--This story was compiled from reports on the Festival by Ann Delorey, a Roman Catholic who is legislative director of the Washington, D.C., office of Church Women United, and Margaret Koehler, a Southern Baptist who serves as ecumenical action chair for CWU in Georgia. Both were CWU delegates to the Festival.

98-2277

Episcopal Women's Caucus meets

by Kathryn McCormick

(ENS) Confronting questions of power and prejudice in society and how they hurt the church, the Episcopal Women's Caucus (EWC) used its annual gathering in Santa Fe, New Mexico, in early November to reflect on the "isms" in society and what women, and men, could do about them.

Led by keynote speaker Katie Geneva Cannon, the first African-American woman to be ordained in the United Presbyterian Church and currently associate professor of religion at Temple University, the nearly 70 persons attending the meeting were challenged to think about racist, sexist and classist stereotypes and the damage they can do.

Such stereotypes, Cannon said, have erected tremendous barriers. She recalled the story of Fannie Lou Hamer, an African-American activist born in segregated Mississippi who defied authorities in her county by registering to vote. She was repeatedly jailed and while there was once beaten nearly to death by white sheriff's deputies. Yet she lived.

Hamer, a God-fearing woman, learned to challenge society's stereotypes, to "keep on keeping on," by following the path of black women's ancient wisdom, Cannon said.

Too often, she said, stereotypes block the honest consideration of what each of us knows and has experienced, the "human archeological sites" that hold memories and their deep lessons. She cited the difficulties of African-American religious scholars who feel they must engage in abstract religious discourse rather than explore the liberation ethics that are much more connected with real life.

This kind of discourse leaves out "the Fannie Lou Hamers of yesterday, the Fannie Lou Hamers of today and the Fannie Lou Hamers of tomorrow. This type of invisibility reinforces racist, sexist, classist stereotypes," she said.

Wisdom in experience

For the world outside the academy, Cannon said, the understanding that there is wisdom in the experience of people, especially those who have been victims of oppression, “emphasizes the need, as people of faith, to see our responsibility to work not merely through religious dimensions of contemporary issues but to dig down deep into the social milieu” to witness the chaos out of which we want to bring order.

In a workshop that filled much of the next day, Cannon and three others—the Rev. Dr. Renee Hill, an Episcopal priest and senior associate for justice and peace at All Saints Church in Pasadena, California; the Rev. Dr. Mary Foulke, a Presbyterian minister and senior associate for children’s and family ministries at All Saints Church; and the Rev. Dr. Susan Harlow of the United Church of Christ, assistant professor of Christian education at Meadville-Lombard Theological School—worked with the predominantly middle-class, white audience to examine privilege and its effects.

Hill suggested some actions that might be taken by individuals and congregations seeking to discern where they are in the hierarchy of oppression and where they want to be. “Do power analysis. Understand who has the power, how is it used, what is my own role in the situation, how can I redirect or transform the power,” she said.

Second, she said, recognize that one kind of oppression often is related to another, and knowing this will help in planning strategies to combat them. Third, acknowledge that “most of us are not only victims”—it is important that we each thoroughly understand our own power and use it to make justice. And last, she added, get away from the kind of thinking that can lead to rigid stereotypes and learn to look at situations and people in a way that allows for their complexities.

Foulke added another dimension to the discussion by looking at matters “specific to white, class-privileged, heterosexually identified women’s culture.”

The pressure to live up to the perfectionism many feel is demanded by society, as well as the self-denial often seen among this particular category of woman, often prevent them from seeing racism as it touches their lives and keeps them from acting on the problems connected with it.

Perfectionism and racism

“Perfectionism causes us to suppress any evidence that we have failed to achieve racial harmony,” she explained. “Anyone who reveals imperfections is shamed.” The white person who owns their own racism, she added, is therefore described as someone who is breaking down. People who are thus shamed tend then to focus on appearances, and tend to practice racial ignorance and spin control rather than meaningful change.

Added to Hill’s and Foulke’s remarks was a charting of what women, and men, could do to transcend privilege, whether in race, class, gender, age, disability or many other categories, and find the connections and support that stereotypes don’t allow people to see.

Harlow emphasized that any changes to be made in how the church responds to the inequalities in society and the damage that causes “will take the effort and abilities of all of us... and it will mean vigilance for our lifetimes.”

This, she added, will require congregational study groups to begin with questions that each member must answer, at least to herself, including, How do race, class, gender and other differences affect me? How is my humanity impaired by others’ oppression?

These groups then need to become educated by reading what others have said about these issues and by talking with people who have been victimized by discrimination and then these groups must confront what they can do in their own congregations.

The work of reconciliation

The Women's Caucus ended with a Eucharist celebrated by Bishop Mary Adelia McLeod of Vermont.

In a sermon that focused on "the lie of full inclusion in our church," and the hard, constant, work of reconciliation, McLeod said, "When we stand before the judgment seat of God, the judge who died for us will not ask, 'Did you understand the mystery of who I am and whip everybody else into shape?'"

"No, I think God's questions to us will be: 'Did you love me above all else and show that love by loving your brothers and sisters as you love yourself?... Did you act for the benefit of others?'"

--Kathryn McCormick is associate director of the Office of News and Information for the Episcopal Church.

98-2278

Lutherans study draft of revised Concordat

by Frank Imhoff

(ELCA) The Church Council of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America voted during its mid-November meeting to send the current draft of "Called to Common Mission: A Lutheran Proposal for a Revision of the 'Concordat of Agreement'" to the ELCA's 1999 Churchwide Assembly for approval. The document, if approved, would establish a partnership of "full communion" with the Episcopal Church.

The council voted to transmit an October 1998 draft of the document to the assembly, so the church's 5.2 million members will have nine months to study it. Three of the council members present voted against transmitting the document.

Linda J. Brown, council member from Moorhead, Minnesota, said the decision to establish full communion with the Episcopal Church has another question embedded in it: "Is the historic episcopate a model of leadership for the ELCA as we enter the 21st century?"

Lutherans and Episcopalians agree on the doctrine of "apostolic succession," an ongoing faithful proclamation of Christ; Episcopalians bring to the relationship the "historic episcopate," a succession of bishops as a sign of unity back to the earliest days of the Christian church.

"As a result of their agreement in faith and in testimony of their full communion with one another, both churches now make the following commitment to share an episcopal succession that is both evangelical and historic," according to CCM.

"There are those within the ELCA who say this is simple," said Brown. "There is also a large group that says it's not that simple. Quite frankly, who am I supposed to believe? Is it really a simple thing?"

The assembly will vote next August in Denver on whether or not to accept CCM "as the basis for a relationship of full communion to be established between the Episcopal Church and the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America." Voting members of the assembly will be able to amend the document.

ELCA Presiding Bishop H. George Anderson said CCM is "our document," and the council could recommend amendments when it meets again in April and in August 1999.

The Concordat of Agreement, referred to in CCM's subtitle, was a blueprint for full communion drafted by the Lutheran-Episcopal Dialogue. The 1997 General Convention of the Episcopal Church approved the Concordat, but the ELCA assembly that year defeated the proposal by six votes and asked that the Concordat be revised, taking the assembly's debate into account and clarifying the technical language of the dialogue.

The Rev. David K. Johnson, council member from Fargo, North Dakota, said the Concordat failed because it required the ELCA to incorporate the historic episcopate, as does CCM. "The main issue is not addressed. There is no change and that issue is creating more heat this time, more anger," he said.

The Rev. Fred Opalinski, council member from Latrobe, Pennsylvania, pointed out that no matter how the vote turns out in August many people will be disappointed. "We as leaders must consider what can be done for healing," he said.

The Church Council passed an accompanying resolution that admitted CCM "may not be a document acceptable to the entire membership of the ELCA," so it called for "honesty, mutual respect and pastoral care for all persons" in both churches during the processes of discussion and decision-making.

The Rev. Steven L. Ullestad, bishop of the ELCA's Northeastern Iowa Synod, reported to the council for the Committee to Create Lutheran/Episcopal Educational Opportunities, which he chairs.

"Volumes of material have been produced over the past 30 years, and much of it has gone largely unread," said Ullestad. He attributed this to the lofty academic language used in many ecumenical documents.

Ullestad said the committee has been working to "translate" some of those documents into materials that congregations can use in adult forums. It has also produced two videos—"Who are the Episcopalians?" and "Who are the Lutherans?"

David F. Hagen, council member from Dearborn, Michigan, said he hoped the educational materials would also inform members about the processes the two churches are using to come to a decision about establishing full communion.

CCM will be mailed to voting members of ELCA synod assemblies in 1999. It will also be included in materials sent to voting members of the Churchwide Assembly. The document is also available on the ELCA web site, www.elca.org.

-- Frank Imhoff is the Associate Director of ELCA News and Information Services.



news briefs

98-2279

After 200 years Warsaw plans to build basilica

(ENI) Polish politicians are supporting plans for a \$50 million Basilica of Divine Providence in Warsaw, to celebrate Pope John Paul II's pontificate and the return to national independence.

"Its exact dimensions and features will be decided after consultation with architects and artists," said Janusz Bodzon, the priest in charge of the project. "It will certainly be a church which reflects the workings of Providence -- which avoids monumental hugeness, as well as undue modesty."

Plans for a church of Divine Providence began in the 18th century, when King Stanislaw II, Poland's last king, commissioned a church of this name as a token of thanks for Poland's 1791 constitution. However, construction was disrupted by the country's partition in 1792 by Russia, Prussia and Austria. Another attempt to build the church in the 1930s was interrupted by the Second World War.

Bodzon said once a final site has been agreed upon, a competition for the basilica's design will be held and Pope John Paul will bless the foundation stone during a pilgrimage to Poland next June.

He added that a completion date of 2001 has been set provided there are no "major financial problems."

Australian church considers radical changes to membership

(ENI) The Uniting Church (UC), often described as the most progressive of Australia's mainstream churches, is considering a radical new definition of membership which would allow a person to belong both to a UC congregation and another denomination at the same time.

The proposals, which seek to open up the UC to the various ways people are already participating in church life, are in the report of a national church task group on membership, chaired by Niall Reid, Sydney parish minister.

"We're trying to help people be involved in the church in the ways they are able to be," said Reid. "Membership or belonging is a process rather than something that happens at a fixed point. Faith is a growing thing, and the connection to the church can be, too. We saw this as making the boundaries enabling, rather than controlling."

The proposal outlines three categories of membership. First, local membership which is based on a person's baptism and his or her participation in a local congregation. Second, people who are baptized but not active in any form of church life. Third, representative membership designed for baptized people who are actively involved in the UC and submit to

its system of government and discipline (note: these are the only people that would be entitled to vote in church councils at local, regional and national levels.) According to the proposals, dual membership could become an option but probably only for those who are in the "local membership" category and wish at the same time, for example, to be members of the Roman Catholic or Anglican churches.

Russia's patriarch condemns anti-Semitic statements

(ENI) Patriarch Alexei II, leader of the Russian Orthodox Church, has condemned anti-Semitic statements by General Albert Makashov, a deputy in the State Parliament.

Speaking at two recent rallies, Makashov, who is known to be a radical Communist, blamed "zhidy" (a derogatory term for Jewish people) for Russia's economic and political turmoil. "I will round up all the [Jews] and send them to the next world," Makashov shouted at the rally held to commemorate the 81st anniversary of the Bolshevik revolution.

Alexei told reporters on November 10 that the Russian Orthodox Church opposed all attempts to stir up prejudice on "nationalist or religious grounds." He added that "all attempts to provoke discord destabilize the fragile peace in our society, and are inadmissible."

Relationships with Jews and with Judaism itself are a complex matter for the Russian Orthodox Church. Even though the church's leaders have in the last few years shown openness and tolerance towards Russia's historic non-Christian religions, some highly conservative nationalist groups in the Orthodox Church continue to express anti-Semitic views. Such is the case of politicians like Makashov who often describe themselves as Orthodox Christians, claiming to defend the church as a symbol of Russia itself.

Government agencies said that Makashov's remarks could in principle be subject to legal action, but that as a member of the Lower House of parliament he was immune from prosecution.

U.S. Lutheran-Roman Catholic dialogue continues

(ELCA) Cardinal Edward Idris Cassidy, the Vatican's chief ecumenist, has again stated that he believes that both the Vatican and the Lutheran World Federation (LWF) will, in the near future, sign a "joint declaration on justification," thereby resolving a doctrinal.

The "joint declaration on justification" aims to resolve a four-centuries-old theological dispute dating from the time of the Reformation. It will allow the lifting of condemnations about the doctrine pronounced by Lutheran and Catholic leaders at the time of the Reformation. The issue of justification goes to the very heart of the 16th-century split between Martin Luther and the Papacy, and if the two communions can reach agreement on the issue, the way may be open for further ecumenical progress.

The National Conference of Catholic Bishops (NCCB) and the U.S.A. National Committee of the LWF initiated the first round of talks. The dialogue has produced a number of common statements on such topics as Scriptures, saints and justification by faith.

According to Cassidy, the Vatican had not expected that it would be possible to have a joint signing of the document in 1998. He added that he hoped a date could be found in 1999, saying that it was important to sign the document before the year 2000.

Institute honors service of Lutherans to church and society

(ENI) The Luther Institute, an independent research and public service center, announced on November 20 three Americans as the 1998 winners of the Luther Institute's Wittenberg Awards which recognizes the achievements of Lutheran laity and clergy in the United States and abroad.

The winners were Willmar Thorkelson, a Minnesota-based journalist, ELCA Bishop April Ulring Larson, of La Crosse, Wisconsin and Shirley Peterson, the president of Hood College and a former commissioner of the US Internal Revenue Service.

Laura Mitchell, vice president of the Luther Institute, told ENI that the winners had "looked at challenges and seized them, and maximized their opportunity for public service." She added, "These people have done something different and changed the world around them."

Thorkelson, whose career has spanned 60 years, was honored for his pioneering coverage of religion in the media. Larson, the first female ELCA bishop and only the second female Lutheran bishop in the world, was praised in the awards for her many accomplishments, including ecumenical initiatives between Lutherans and Roman Catholics. Peterson was praised for her public service while working for the federal government and for her commitment to the education of women.

British minister's remarks condemned

(ENI) The church-backed Jubilee 2000 coalition which is campaigning for the relief of Third World debt has condemned remarks by Clare Short, a British cabinet minister, who said debt relief was not a "magic bullet."

"There is a real danger that good people will believe that debt relief is the 'magic bullet' to end all poverty, and that debt is the cause of poverty. That is untrue," Short said. "Debt relief should not go to all poor countries. It should support those committed to poverty eradication. It should not be unconditional ...".

Jubilee 2000 is supported by all of Britain's mainstream churches and has affiliated organizations around the world. Its goal is for rich Western nations to write off the unpayable debt of Third World countries, to mark the Millennium.

Estimates of the world's unpayable debt are as high as \$250 billion. For every \$1 currently given in development aid to the Third World, \$3 is eventually returned to rich countries in debt-service payments.

Jubilee 2000 staff member Angela Travis told ENI, "Clare Short has, not for the first time, misunderstood the position of the Jubilee 2000 coalition. She implied that we are calling for unconditional debt relief. This is not the case."

Despite her controversial message, Short was given a standing ovation for her analysis of the connection between debt and poverty. She called for a world-wide alliance of

“people of faith and moral purpose” committed to “the elimination of extreme poverty from the world during the next century.”

Short also said the government was making a grant of \$42,000 to help the dialogue spearheaded by Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, between world faiths and the World Bank. She added that the immediate target of halving, by 2015, the number of those living in abject poverty was “affordable and achievable.”

Canadian archdiocese to close half its parishes

(ENI) The Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton, which has about 300,000 members and is one of the Canadian church’s biggest geographical area, is planning to close almost half its parishes due to a shortage of priests.

John Acheson, author of the 110-page diocesan report, “Faithful Into the Future: A Pastoral Plan for the Catholic Archdiocese of Edmonton” said, “I think that this is a phenomenon that is hitting every diocese in North America and in Western Europe.” But he insisted in an interview with ENI that the church was not in a crisis, and that the lack of priests gave lay people an opportunity to get involved in church life.

The report, which took Acheson and a committee 18 months to prepare, was made public on November 17. “The plan is to move ahead with the recommendations,” he said.

The archdiocese has 79 priests serving 166 parishes. In many of the parishes mass is said only once a month or so. The report calls for consolidation of 78 parishes. Nine have already been closed.

Acheson told ENI that every parish in the diocese would feel the effects in one way or another. But he added, “No one will have to travel more than 30 minutes to go to mass on the weekend. We have only 42 of what we call diocesan priests, the other 37 are members of religious orders.”

“At the same time,” Acheson continued, “this is not to be seen as a crisis for us. I think that society is changing, so our church has to change. We had a real kick-start in our change in the early 1960s with our Vatican II Council. A lot of those changes are just now being implemented.”

Old Catholic Church opens ministry to women

(ENI) The two bishops and the synod of the Old Catholic Church, in the Netherlands, agreed on November 24 to open the priesthood and all levels of the church hierarchy to women.

At the same time the Dutch bishops tried to convince the International Bishop’s Conference, which includes 14 Old Catholic bishops from around the world, to accept women’s ordination. This led to a decision in 1997 that all member churches of the Union of Utrecht were free to accept women’s ordination, without jeopardizing the unity of the union. Today Old Catholic churches in Germany, Austria and Switzerland have female priests.

Old Catholic opponents of women’s ordination believe that opening up the ministry will damage the church’s delicate relationship with the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox churches.

The Old Catholic Church was established in 1723 in The Hague, The Netherlands, after a major dispute with the Roman Catholic Church. Some members consider their church to be the continuation of the Catholic Church and for many years this subject was a matter of deep concern for the Old Catholic Church.

Despite this milestone, the Dutch church does not expect to have many women priests or bishops in the immediate future.

There are only 7,000 members and like most traditional churches, in Western Europe, is no longer rapidly growing. About half the current members of the Old Catholic Church in the Netherlands were not born into Old Catholic families.

Return of paganism if Church of England withdraws

(ENI) Robert Hardy, Bishop of Lincoln, announced on November 19 that his large and mainly rural diocese risked a return to paganism if the Church of England withdrew from villages where it was often the only religious presence.

"It's a case of the Church of England or paganism. I do not exaggerate," he said.

He pointed out that Roman Catholics had never had a strong presence in the countryside of the diocese, while much of it was "unrecoverable for Methodism." (Traditionally many rural workers in England have been members of the Methodist Church.)

The president of the Methodist Conference, Professor Peter Stephens, told ENI, "There is a serious challenge to churches in the countryside, but we must not exaggerate. When I visited Lincolnshire I was more hopeful of the church in the countryside there than the bishop of Lincoln is. We must not generalize from Lincoln for the countryside as a whole. I have been in Devon [western England] and seen strong village chapels, and this is also true of other parts of the countryside. I see the danger as materialism rather than paganism -- unless you mean by paganism no religion."

Moravians sign agreement with UK churches

(ENI) The Moravian Church, the Church of England and the Church of Ireland have signed the Fetter Lane Agreement, in which one of the world's oldest Protestant churches has cemented two centuries of links to the Church of England with an ecumenical agreement pledging "to share a common life and mission".

John McOwat, the Moravians' chief administrator for the province of Great Britain and Ireland, told ENI, "Church members are excited at this good beginning to a new chapter. Among the practical benefits are likely to be the training of our students at Anglican theological colleges and greater co-operation at local level."

The Moravians have 36 congregations in the UK and one meeting group in the Irish Republic, making a total of about 2,000 communicant members. Although relatively small, the church is important in the history of Protestantism. A Moravian leader, Peter Bohler, who established the Fetter Lane Church in London in 1738, was an important influence on John Wesley, the founder of Methodism. Wesley was at his lowest ebb after an unsuccessful

missionary expedition to Georgia, North America, when Boehler convinced him he lacked the faith required for salvation. On May 24, 1738, Wesley had a conversion experience while listening to a reading of Luther's Preface to Romans. This moved Wesley to promote a "vital, practical religion," spending the rest of his life in evangelical work.

The Fetter Lane Agreement, signed November 7, acknowledges "the common confession of the apostolic faith" and "the extent of our common traditions of spirituality and liturgy." It commits the churches to an extensive pattern of co-operation, including the exchange of ministers between the churches, but stops short of fully interchangeable ministries. It pledges "to intensify the relations between our two churches as a step on the way to the goal of full visible unity."

McOwat told ENI that as he understood it, Moravian ministers could not consecrate bread and wine for use in the two Anglican churches. Under the agreement, the Fetter Lane statement will be shared with Anglican and Moravian churches around the world.

Boesak's bookkeeper makes surprise apology

(ENI) Freddie Steenkamp, former bookkeeper to the Foundation of Peace and Justice (FPJ), apologized in court for allegations he made against the FPJ's director, Dr Allan Boesak, a former anti-apartheid campaigner and clergyman.

Steenkamp, who is serving a six-year prison sentence for fraud and theft from the FPJ, told the court on November 17 that he had dragged Boesak into the scandal because he bore a grudge for the public shame Boesak placed upon him.

"Your own theft has dumped Dr. Boesak into this mess, and for three years the media has portrayed Boesak as a dishonest rogue," said Mike Maritz, Boesak's senior counsel. "You have ruined his political career and caused his rejection for top career opportunities as well."

Steenkamp agreed, adding, "I apologize unconditionally."

However, when Maritz asked Steenkamp to withdraw other allegations that Boesak had improperly transferred funds from the FPJ's Children's Fund, Steenkamp replied, "I do not retract that." (The prosecution alleges that a large sum of money was missing from the fund which Boesak set up to safeguard "the interests of children who are victims of apartheid.")

Catholics oppose sale of church to armaments company

(ENI) Despite the Roman Catholic Church's opposition to the arms trade and the adoption of an ethical investment policy by his own diocese, Bishop John Brewer of the Diocese of Lancaster in England is continuing his negotiations with British Aerospace (BAe) to sell the Church of the Holy Family.

In a deal valued at an estimated \$1.7 million, BAe, Britain's largest arms manufacturer, plans to bulldoze the church to improve access to a factory where it builds Hawk jets. (Hawk jets are sold to the Indonesian government, which, according to

campaigners against the arms trade, has killed 200,000 people in East Timor since the 1975 invasion.) BAe would then build a replacement church, a church hall and a priest's house. Brewer said he will set aside any surplus from the sale for the "promotion of ethical causes."

The negotiations for the sale of the church have caused an uproar with many Catholics, who want Brewer to take a moral stand and reject the deal. A parishioner told ENI the sale would "aid and abet oppression and murder [in East Timor]." He added, "The church can't duck its responsibilities. It has got to stand up for oppressed people."

Another parishioner accused Brewer of being "extremely naïve" and of valuing money above human life.

Bishop Brewer has described his contacts with BAe as a "God-given opportunity." He said, "Talking with these manufacturers is not an opportunity that is often presented, and is one which we should make the most of. I would talk to anybody about the ethics of their life. It's my job."

Russian Orthodox church afloat

(ENI) Thousands of Russians, many of whom had never seen an Orthodox Church in operation, can now attend church services, be baptized or even be married on a floating church called Saint Metropolitan Innokenty.

Nikolai Agafonov, head of the missionary department of the Russian Orthodox diocese of Volgograd and supervisor of the floating church project, told ENI he was delighted with the results. "When we saw people crying with joy [in the floating church], we understood that we had done the right thing. People who were nearly 70 years old came to confession for the first time in their lives. In every village we were asked to stay for good."

Since Archbishop German of Volgograd consecrated the floating sanctuary on May 22, the church has stopped at village after village along the Volga-Don Canal and the Don River. It is presently docked at a village where it will be used for services during the winter. When the ice melts next spring, the church will continue its journey, staying for a few days in each village that has no Orthodox church.

Some villagers had told Agafonov of the time long ago when there was a local Orthodox church. It was clear, he said, that people were looking for God, and, if the Orthodox church did not return, "others will take their souls."

He added, in the town of Komsomolsk half the local people had become Jehovah's Witnesses because of mission work. During the floating church's visit, many of them "returned to the Orthodox Church and repented."

Opus Dei to raise profile with \$42 million base

(ENI) The Roman Catholic organization Opus Dei plans to celebrate the year 2000 by opening a new 17-story, \$42-million United States (US) headquarters in the heart of New York City. The building, which should be completed by late 1999, is intended to give a

higher national profile to Opus Dei, an organization which in the past has had a reputation, at least among its critics, for secrecy.

According to William Schmitt, Opus Dei's communications director in the US, moving the offices from the New York City suburb of New Rochelle to Manhattan is symbolic of a new effort by the organization to expand its apostolic and evangelical work.

"New York City is the crossroads of the world," Schmitt told ENI. "We see this building as bringing our message to the people of New York and to the wider world. We see it as a base of operations to carry out our apostolates in New York and the rest of the country."

Opus Dei was founded in Spain in 1928 by Josemaria Escriva de Balaguer (1902-1975), who in 1992 was beatified or granted the title blessed by Pope John Paul II. (Beatification is often the first step towards canonization.)

Now with 80,000 followers, including 3,000 followers in the US, Opus Dei (which in Latin means the work of God) was set up to celebrate the divinity of "ordinary work." Opus Dei's mission, Schmitt said, was to help its members find and strive for "holiness" in their work, family and personal lives. Among other activities, Opus Dei sponsors retreats, seminars and classes.

Bishop Griswold live from Washington National Cathedral

(ENS) The Most Reverend Frank Tracy Griswold, presiding bishop of the Episcopal Church, will offer reflections and respond to questions from parishioners gathered in churches and parish halls across the nation in a live teleconference from Washington National Cathedral on Sunday, January 10, 1999. The program will be broadcast via the Episcopal Cathedral Teleconferencing Network.

Marking the first anniversary of his investiture, which took place at the Cathedral before a national and international audience via satellite and the Internet, Griswold will offer reflections on the many ministries he has experienced throughout the Church during his first year as presiding bishop. He also will respond to questions from parishioners via telephone calls from across the country.

The telecast begins at 3 pm with an evensong, featuring the choirs of Washington National Cathedral and special prayers of thanksgiving for the bishop's ministry. This will be followed at 4 pm with the forum by the presiding bishop, which concludes at 6 pm. (For those who miss it there will be a re-broadcast at 6 pm by videotaped delay.)

For more information look at the Episcopal Church's Internet website at www.ecusa.anglican.org, ECTN website at www.ectn.org or the Cathedral website at www.cathedral.org.

New Bishop for Diocese of Western New York

(ENS) The diocese of Western New York recently elected the Rev. J. Michael Garrison as their new bishop. Garrison, regional vicar for the Episcopal Diocese of Nevada, was elected the 10th bishop of Western New York by 290 voting delegates meeting December 5th at St. Paul's Cathedral in Buffalo.

Upon receiving news of his election, Garrison said, "I am humbled and I must admit, a bit surprised... I know that with God's grace we'll move together into the future as the people of God in Western New York."

Garrison, one of seven candidates considered by the convention, was originally ordained in the Roman Catholic Church. He was received by the Episcopal Church in 1975.

"Through joint meetings of the Episcopal and Roman clergy in eastern Oregon, I realized that I had more in common with my Episcopal brethren than my Roman Catholic. When I resigned the parish I was serving, Episcopal Bishop Bill Spofford referred me to Bishop Wes Frensdorff who invited me to come to Nevada," explained Garrison. "After a few months I began the formal process to be received as a priest of the Episcopal Church. In 1975 I was received as a deacon and then as a priest and have served congregations in central and southern Nevada since then," he said.

Garrison and his wife Carol are expected to move to the Buffalo area early next year. His consecration will take place at Kleinhans' Music Hall on April 24, 1999.

Episcopalian...again

(CC) The Rt. Rev. Clarence C. Pope, Jr., has returned to the Episcopal Church (ECUSA) after having twice left it for the Roman Catholic Church according to Christian Challenge.

Pope's trips between Canterbury and Rome first began in 1994 prior to his retirement as bishop of Fort Worth. He announced to a chapter of the Catholic Clerical Union his conclusion that for orthodox Episcopalians, the turmoil in ECUSA was best addressed by the Roman Catholic Church. His decision got mixed reviews among members of the organization he formerly led, Episcopal Synod of America (ESA).

Pope and his wife Martha were received into the Roman Catholic Church in 1995. It took only seven months for him to return to ECUSA, citing that he found his thinking "increasingly compromised" because the rescript from Rome called for him to be ordained anew rather than conditionally. Pope felt it meant denying the validity and efficacy of his Anglican ordination and consecration.

Former Presiding Bishop Edmond Lee Browning paved the way for Pope's return by advising the ECUSA House of Bishops (which had never acted to accept Pope's resignation) that Pope was under treatment for aggressive cancer and wanted to live his remaining time in the Episcopal Church.

Pope was welcomed back only to seek out the Roman Church last February for his original conversion. His friends have speculated that his current homecoming may have been motivated by the generally orthodox outcome of the 1998 Lambeth Conference and/or

disappointment over the wait for the ordination rescript from the Holy See, though only some eight months had transpired since his readmission to the Roman Communion.

Canterbury Cathedral Choir to tour U.S. and Canada

(ACNS) The Canterbury Cathedral Choir, one of the world's preeminent choral ensembles, will perform six concerts in the U.S. and three in Canada April 6-20, 1999.

The Canterbury Cathedral Choir, a performing organization with an international reputation for high standards, is the residential musical ensemble for the spiritual seat of the 70 million member worldwide Anglican Communion that reaches into more than 160 countries. As the birthplace of English Christianity and the church home to 103 archbishops of the Anglican Church, Canterbury Cathedral has become sacred to pilgrims as an international shrine.

The Choirs' itinerary includes: The Cathedral of St. John the Baptist, St. John's Newfoundland – April 6; Christ Church Cathedral, Ottawa – April 8; St. Paul's Anglican Church, Toronto – April 9; Holy Name Cathedral, Chicago – April 11; Trinity Episcopal Church, Hartford – April 16; the Cathedral of St. Philip, Atlanta – April 18; and the Church of the Incarnation, Dallas – April 19. The tour will consist of 18 boys between the ages of 8 and 12 years, 12 lay clerks (men's voices,) David Flood, Master of the Choristers and organist Andrew Bryden.

Under Flood's leadership, the Choir has conducted critically acclaimed tours in Europe and North America - including a highly successful tour of the U.S. and Canada in 1994. In 1997, the Choir celebrated the 1400th anniversary of the arrival of St. Augustine in Canterbury with concerts in Rome and throughout France. That same year, Flood and the Cathedral hosted an American Children's Choir Festival with over 400 participants. This event will be repeated in 1999.

Tickets for the U.S. concerts will be available beginning January 2, 1999. To charge by phone call 800/874-9330 or log on to the web at www.stewartgrp.com/canterbury.

\$200,000 awarded to the Religious Communication Congress

(ENS) The Religious Communication Congress 2000 (RCC 2000) was recently awarded \$200,000, from Lilly Endowment, Inc., for programming during its upcoming event in Chicago, Illinois.

RCC 2000 is a forum for communication of religion that is international and multi-faith. The congress is being planned and hosted by North American faith groups with special interest in more effective global communication of religion.

"This grant allows our planning team to invite presenters from around the world and increase our ability to include state-of-the-art communication technology along with oral and print tradition," said Shirley Whipple Struchen, a United Methodist producer and Chair of RC 2000.

“Faith Stories in a Changing World” is the theme of the once-a-decade congress started in 1970. The program, March 29-April 1, 2000, will focus on five major ways of sharing faith stories: spoken, electronic, cyber space, written and artistic stories and will include workshops, challenging speakers and interactive dialogue.

Conference presenters include John White, Pulitzer Prize-winning photo journalist from the Chicago Sun-Times and Pradip Thomas, director, Studies and Publications, World Association for Christian Communication, London.

Lilly Endowment is a private foundation that follows the wishes of its founders by supporting the causes of religion, education and community development.



news features

98-2280

AIDS conference warns epidemic is not over—and churches must get involved

by James Solheim

(ENS) A high-level conference of leaders from America's faith communities and the medical profession met recently in Atlanta and issued a warning that the AIDS epidemic is far from over—and a plea that religious groups get involved in overcoming the stigma that interferes with healing.

In discussing trends in the HIV-AIDS epidemic at the four-day November meeting at the Carter Center in Atlanta, Dr. Robert Janssen of the Center for Disease Control and Prevention said that 30 million people are living with AIDS today and there are 35-40,000 new cases a year, two-thirds of them among racial minorities. "The huge issue is that the most vulnerable in our society are getting the last care," he said, especially the homeless and those with mental problems. Of the 750,000 people who are HIV- positive in America, only one-half are receiving care. "And we are doing a poor job of identifying early" those who contract the disease and need help.

In addressing the role of the faith community, Janssen urged education to reduce the stigma attached to HIV-AIDS. He admitted that the medical community is "so hung up on a cure that it hasn't dealt adequately with healing." He pointed out that belief could affect the ability of the immune system to deal with the disease, adding that medical models don't always recognize those benefits.

Dr. Michael Merson, dean of the Yale School of Public Health, said that his visits to 150 countries helped him realize the important role of religious leaders, but he was frustrated by the realization that they were "fine with care, but uncomfortable with prevention."

He said that he found the figures of those affected "numbing," with a possible 50 million infected so far, half of them in sub-Saharan Africa where 25-30 percent could die in the coming years. The epidemic is just beginning in Asia but he is convinced that it will end up being "disastrous." For example, in China and India, where only eight million are now infected, the number will quickly move to 38 million, more than Africa. And he foresees a major epidemic in Eastern Europe. "Obviously we are still in the early stages in many parts of the world."

Merson related an encounter with medical personnel in a Ugandan Roman Catholic hospital where he was told, "It's one epidemic," and that "what's happening in America is no different than what we are seeing in the rest of the world." He concluded, "If we apply what we have learned about prevention, we don't need to repeat it in other parts of the world."

He warned, "We are 15 years away, at best, from having a vaccine," making efforts at prevention very important. But that requires confronting the myths about the disease, a difficult task because of a continuing hesitancy to discuss sexual issues. He said it is crucial to overcome the "Victorian in ourselves that equates sex with sin." Communities of color have special issues of resistance, he said, contending that racism and homophobia and denial "is a many-headed monster."

Yet treatment, even when it works well, is not a cure, Merson said, adding that today's success with various drug treatments will diminish in 3-5 years. "We are sitting on a time bomb and it is painful to talk about the possibility of resurgence of the disease." He ended his presentation with a plea for the faith communities to help with prevention, to empower those who are attempting to cope with the disease. "And view every new case of AIDS as a failure."

Defining the problem

Roman Catholic theologian Mary Hunt, who offered daily meditations during the conference, said that she is convinced that "we are engaged in the very best of interreligious, ecumenical work, driven not by ideology but by necessity because people are sick and dying and we can help."

"I think it is time for those of us who are Christian to state clearly and simply that some beliefs, attitudes, practices, teachings from our tradition have contributed to the HIV-AIDS pandemic," she added. "What we are doing here then is not, finally, heroic, but the ordinary work of being religious, of being linked with one another and with those who have come before us and those who will follow us."

Describing the meeting as an opportunity to "keep pace theologically with the pandemic," Hunt added, "It is a time to hope, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding, that we can do some things together that might help us to stem the tide because of the ways in which religious beliefs have been more a part of the problem than the solution thus far." She added that the participants could be "the beginnings of an interreligious force for justice and healing that I believe will eventually replace as outmoded and inadequate the piecemeal efforts of our various traditions."

She cited a lecture by Dr. Jonathan Mann of Harvard, who died in the recent Swissair crash in Nova Scotia and to whom the conference was dedicated, who said that the old model of chasing the virus was no longer adequate. Mann said that "how we define a problem determines what we do about it," and that the response must take into account societal factors "in the scope, intensity and nature of the discrimination that exists within each community or country." Hunt interpreted those remarks as a sign that "science was now relying on me, and on you, the people whose work it is to define problems and shape attitudes." She concluded, "We who ask questions for a living can shape the way in which an issue is perceived and dealt with."

If Merson is right, she said, "we had better hurry up and get beyond what has been described as 'pelvic theology' to public discussions of fundamental issues of race, class and gender as they frame this unequal opportunity disease."

Frustration from care-givers

Those who are on the front-lines of fighting the disease told harrowing stories of the obstacles they face, most of them because of the moral qualms about a disease so linked to

gay men and drug-users. "I'm saddened by the religious community's resistance to AIDS," said the Rev. Jeff Peterson-Davis, a Presbyterian who directs the Atlanta AIDS Network. "You would think the religious world would show unconditional love towards sufferers but that has not been the case."

The Interfaith Health Program at the Carter Center, a sponsor of the conference with the AIDS National Interfaith Network, the American Academy of Religion and the Interdenominational Theological Center (ITC) in Atlanta.

"What in our traditions allows us to demonize others and oppress them?" asked Dr. Randall Bailey, a black theologian at ITC. "Why do we embrace those facets of our religion that oppress others?" He said that blacks seem to accept gays only as musicians, adding that "only recently has the church been willing to be openly oppressive. We feed the destructive tendencies of theology when we distinguish so-called innocent victims from those of the despised group."

The Rev. Tina Pippen, an Episcopal deacon and professor of biblical studies and ethics at Agnes Scott College in Decatur, Georgia, said that many Christians "can understand perfectly a justice issue half-way around the world but marginalize their neighbors at home." She argued that organized religion finds it difficult to discuss gay-rights issues or gender justice, often lapsing into judgmental rather than compassionate approaches in dealing with homosexuals, the poor, youth or pregnant women at high risk.

The Rev. Carter Heyward of Episcopal Divinity School in Massachusetts said that the epidemic has created a moral and spiritual crisis for many religious traditions because it has provoked reactions too often based on fear. The crisis should encourage faith groups to seek creative theological and ethical responses. "Through the lens of economic privilege and poverty, race, gender, education and health care we would see more fully into the workings of both good and evil in human life—and into the presence of both human and divine life working through the AIDS crisis," she said.

The Rev. Troy Perry, founder of the Metropolitan Community Church, a predominantly gay denomination, told the participants that "funerals are down but the battle isn't over yet. Because drugs are working for many it is easy to be lulled into a sense of security," he said. When the epidemic began to ease in 1996 too many were encouraged to take that as "a visible sign that it's over. When you live under a cloud, even a few rays of sunshine is such a thrill it lures us into a false sense of eagerness to move back to regular life."

The Rev. Jimmy Allen, who described himself as the last non-fundamental president of the Southern Baptist Convention, said in a dinner address that "the problem is a heart problem, an attitude problem." He told of the "deep blow of disappointment" he and his family felt when his HIV-positive grandson was blocked from attending Sunday school. "But he was received at McDonald's," Allen said, urging his audience to "stay with the networks, find the folks who care." He concluded, "We are at a time when we are weary, a time of discouragement, but also a time when a breakthrough is possible."

--James Solheim is the director of the Office of News and Information for the Episcopal Church.

98-2281

Presiding Bishop issues statement on Iraq

December 18, 1998

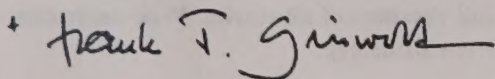
In these December days, as Christians await the coming of the Prince of Peace, Hanukkah has just begun, and the season of Ramadan is days away, it is a tragic irony that the relationship between the United States and Iraq has deteriorated into military conflict once again in that part of the world called holy by Christians, Jews and Muslims.

The Iraqi government's refusal to cooperate with United Nations arms inspectors, and the U.S. decision to bomb Iraq, reminds us how far we are from a season of reconciliation and peace. Even so, I remain convinced that the shared visions of peace which our three traditions embrace show us the way to resolve international disputes.

I invite all persons of good will to join me in prayer for the men and women of our armed forces who are now engaged in this military conflict, and for the Iraqi people who have suffered so much through this conflict.

For the long view, I would call on our government and the United Nations to reassess current policies with Iraq and to see what alternatives might better serve the cause of peace and end this long nightmare for millions of innocent Iraqis. The deaths of over half a million children from the effects of sanctions demonstrate a failure of moral leadership both in Iraq and by the international community. I will ask the Executive Council of the Episcopal Church to review the long, sad saga of war and sanctions and to assist the church in framing a more compassionate and just response.

As Jesus blessed the peacemakers, may we strive to be worthy of that blessing as peacemakers for these times.



The Most Rev. Frank T. Griswold
Presiding Bishop and Primate
The Episcopal Church

Photographs included in this issue of ENS:

1. Phoebe Griswold, wife of the presiding bishop, and Bishop Leo Frade on the waterfront in Tegucigalpa, Honduras (98-2274)
2. Ann Vest, interim director of the Presiding Bishop's Fund, visits girls at Our Little Roses residence (98-2274)
3. Bishop Leo Frade and Phoebe Griswold, wife of the presiding bishop, watch as residents receive fresh water (98-2274)
4. Bishop Leo Frade of Honduras somberly climbs through the ruins of a diocesan building in Tegucigalpa (98-2274)
5. Phoebe Griswold, wife of the presiding bishop, leads a game with homeless children in Puerto Cortes, Honduras (98-2274)
6. Group led by Phoebe Griswold, the presiding bishop's wife, visits Honduras to see what the Episcopal Church has done there (98-2274)
7. Helpers distribute food, water and clothing in Morales, Honduras (98-2274)
8. On a debris-strewn street in Morales, Honduras, ruined by mud and rain from Hurricane Mitch (98-2274)
9. Local aid to Hondurans (98-2274)
10. Harare's Anglicans welcome WCC delegates to Zimbabwe (98-2275)
11. Local churches join WCC delegates for Africa Day Celebration (98-2275)
12. Local choirs offer traditional music at WCC's Africa Day Celebration (98-2275)
13. President Mandela of South Africa brings greetings to WCC Assembly (98-2275)
14. Episcopal Church delegation participates in WCC Assembly in Zimbabwe (98-2275)
15. Episcopal Church delegates join in demonstration on debt cancellation (98-2275)
16. WCC Assembly features over 550 paduares, or meeting places (98-2275)
17. Archbishop of Canterbury preaches at Anglican service during WCC Assembly (98-2275)
18. Plenaries at WCC Assembly struggle to redefine the ecumenical movement (98-2275)

(All photos are also available in color)

The Episcopal News Service is available electronically. QUEST users can join the "Episcopal News Service" meeting to receive full versions of all stories. Web users can visit the official Episcopal Church website at www.dfms.org.

